

Healthcare Questions

Q: Is Taunton publishing daily coronavirus case numbers?

A: Yes. It began doing so Dec. 15. They can be found on the city's continuously updated [coronavirus website](#). The website lists the number of active cases in Taunton. The city of Taunton also has a COVID-19 hotline number that you can call with any questions that you have, (774) 406-5898. For more coronavirus numbers, including rates and total cases, check the [state's reporting](#) which is updated daily.

Q: How can people tell if they have COVID-19 instead of a cold or flu?

Dr. Charles Thayer's (Morton Hospital Chief Medical Officer)

Answer: It's going to be very difficult to tell the difference between people who are not very sick with COVID and people who just have the sniffles and have a cold. There are certain defining things that occur with COVID that do not occur with colds or flu, and one of them is loss of taste and smell. So, if you have an illness and you feel like you have a cold and you have actually lost all taste and smell, it's very likely that you may have COVID. At the same time, sniffles, headache, difficulty with cough, deep breathing issues can be symptoms of flu and COVID. So always make sure that you contact your doctor and ask them for advice with what to do.

Q: Does Morton hospital have enough beds and ventilators?

Morton Hospital President Heidi Taylor's Answer: Right now we have plenty of capacity. About one-third of our volume is COVID-19 patients and that is remaining steady. We do have a surge unit that we are prepared to open should the volume get greater than our normal capacity. We have ample ventilators and have added seven additional negative pressure rooms. We are fully open for all medical services right now and want to make sure that people

are seeking the treatment that they need, whether it's COVID-related or non-COVID.

Q: Where in Taunton can you get free COVID testing?

A: Morton Hospital does 300 COVID-19 tests a day from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. All you need is a referral from a doctor, and the appointment can be walk-in. Manet Community Health Center also does testing on Mondays from noon to 4 p.m. at the Department of Human Services at 30 Olney St. Pre-registration is required.

Q: Can I get tested for COVID-19 if I don't have any symptoms and I haven't been exposed to anyone who's tested positive?

A: To be tested in any of the local area testing stations, you need to have a doctor's order. Contact your primary care provider and ask them about getting an order for a test.

Q: Are patients admitted to Morton Hospital with COVID counted as Taunton cases even if they live in other towns?

A: No. COVID-19 cases are typically counted towards their community of residence — in other words, where they live. If a person is hospitalized at Morton but they do not live in Taunton, they wouldn't be counted towards Taunton, they'd be counted towards whatever town or city that they live in.

Q: Is there another way to be tested for COVID-19 besides through the nostril?

Dr. Thayer's answer: Not really. During the first surge it was very important to go all the way back until you really were truly uncomfortable with the nasal swab. All of those tests have changed. Now, virtually everybody is doing a test of just the interior nose so you don't have to go all the way back and it is not nearly as uncomfortable. There are a number of other tests, but they're not thought to be the gold standard.

Q: What should you do if a family member tests positive for COVID-19 but your apartment is too small to isolate the person who was infected?

A: The Taunton Holiday Inn is currently serving as an isolation and recovery center. It is set up for people who are not able to isolate in their home setting. The phone number to call to get a room is 617-367-5150.

Q: Will Morton Hospital continue to provide elective surgeries during the pandemic?

Dr. Charles Thayer's Answer: That will be left up to the doctor and the patient. Elective is a very hard thing to define. There are many people who require colonoscopies because they have issues that they should not wait several months to do. There are some people that have cancers that need to have those surgeries done. Even though they are pre-scheduled, they are essential surgeries to have. We are open and we are providing that care to everybody who crosses our threshold. We don't want to have any delays in essential services to each and every community member. If you have issues that are health related, please don't wait. Discuss it with your physician or, if you're really sick, please come to our emergency room.

Q: Is there a number people can call to report businesses that aren't taking COVID-19 precautions?

A: If it is workplace specific, report to the Massachusetts Department of Labor Standards. The Taunton Board of Health and the Mayor's Office can also receive reports and those reports will be followed up on.

Economic and Emotional Survival Questions

Q: How can I help older family members who are lonely without putting them in danger?

A: Taunton's Council on Aging has a lot of resources for the elderly. They do a lot of virtual programs, such as online exercising. Their number is 508-821-1425.

Q: How can small businesses get help surviving through shutdowns?

A: There are grants available through the city of Taunton Office of Economic and Community Development. Businesses should go online to [the city's website](#). They can also call the Office of Economic Development at 508-821-1030.

Q: What do I do if I'm a landlord and my tenant can't pay rent but I have to pay the mortgage on the property?

A: Tenants can call the state helpline at 211 and they will help them find any available assistance. Landlords are also encouraged to contact their mortgage company to see what kind of assistance they may be able to help with. In Taunton, you can also call the Human Services Department at 508-821-1420.

Taunton Public Schools Questions

Q: What resources are there for parents who cannot stay home with their children while they are doing remote learning?

A: The Taunton Boys and Girls Club has learning pods where they accept children to go and do their remote learning there during the school day. They are accepting children to start in January. The Taunton YMCA has a similar program where they accept children and the kids do remote learning there during the school day, but there is a waitlist. Girls Inc. also does Virtual Learning Support for families and they have a couple of spots available for girls only. Lastly, Taunton Public Schools has an extended day program where they are providing childcare at the former Hopewell Elementary School. If parents are interested, they can reach out to the superintendent's office and

they can put them in contact with the extended day director to see if that's a viable option as well.

Q: If your child has close contact with a student who tested positive for COVID-19 does that mean the whole family has to quarantine?

Karen Regan's (Nurse Manager for Taunton Public Schools)

Answer: No, the whole family does not need to quarantine. But, the individual that was identified as a close contact should isolate from the rest of the family and all family members should check for COVID-like symptoms.

Q: Now that the whole state has moved back to Phase 3.1, does that affect our schools?

Superintendent John Cabral's Answer: No, at this phase we are still able to operate safely as we have been, and we will continue to monitor the situation and guidance from health professionals.

Q: Is there a date set for children to go back to school full-time?

Superintendent John Cabral's Answer: No. The situation continues to be extremely fluid. We are excited to learn about the potential of the vaccine being deployed to school systems. But again, we still have a lot of time to go. We have to continue to analyze the trajectory of the virus and the impact that it's having on our community. We want to make sure that when we do make the decision to return, that we're doing it in the safest way based on the recommendations of our area health officials. Our plan is to continue with students who are attending remote and students who are attending in hybrid for the foreseeable future. If that changes, we will try to provide as much notice as possible.

Q: How do parents turn in proof of a flu shot for children that go to Taunton Public Schools?

A: The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has mandated that all students, whether they are in school learning or remote, must show proof of a flu shot by Dec. 31. Contact your child's school nurse and send a copy of the paperwork so that they meet this mandate. There are two exceptions — a medical exemption from your doctor or a religious exemption.

Q: Are all students' families within a school notified if a COVID-19 case is confirmed within a school or is it only close contacts?

A: When a school is notified that a student attending in person schooling has tested positive for COVID-19, it sends a notification out that goes to the entire school community. It also goes out to the entire public school staff.